

# Soviet Congress Rejects Lithuanian Secession Move

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MOSCOW, March 15 — The Soviet Parliament today overwhelmingly rejected Lithuania's declaration of independence as invalid, and it directed President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to protect Soviet citizens and interests in the republic.

After an emotional debate in which the decision was repeatedly attacked as a betrayal of the country and an irresponsible act, the resolution was adopted by a vote of 1,463 to 94, with 128 abstentions. The rest of the 2,244 members in the full Parliament were not recorded as voting.

At the urging of President Gorbachev, the final resolution was far milder than the original reproach presented to the Parliament, known as the Congress of People's Deputies.

Mr. Gorbachev's strategy seemed to be to allow the excited deputies to vent their anger and fears over Lithuania's decision, then to cut back and tone down the resolution, which he did calmly and effortlessly, helping to defuse the situation.

## Not Legally Binding

In the final resolution, the deputies declared that the decisions taken on Sunday by the Lithuanian Parliament — suspending the Soviet Constitution and re-establishing the Baltic republic's prewar independence — were not legally binding.

The resolution confirmed "the right of every republic to secede," which is guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution, but said that until a law was in place spelling out the mechanism for secession, the decisions taken by the Lithuanian Parliament are invalid.

The original resolution, far harsher in tone, was introduced by Rafik Nishanov, chairman of the Council of Nationalities, one of the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet, which is the full Parliament's standing legislature. That



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No government has recognized Lithuania's declaration of independence.

resolution immediately provoked a feverish reaction in the hall, and deputies lined up to respond.

"I consider this a blow in the back of our Soviet people," said Vitaly P. Ivanov, commander of the Baltic naval fleet, to the applause of people in the hall. "This is a kick in the back of perestroika, an action against the political and economic reforms in our country, a blow against the defense capability of our state and over the fates of hundreds of thousands of people."

On Sunday, Lithuania became the first Soviet republic formally to declare its independence from the Soviet Union when its newly elected Parliament voted unanimously to restore its prewar independence.

Lithuania and its neighboring Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia, were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940 as a result of a secret treaty between Hitler and Stalin carv-

ing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Puppet parliaments dubiously elected under the pressure of the Soviet Army later requested that the three republics be admitted to the Soviet Union. All three have recently condemned the original pact and invalidated the wartime elections.

With the debate in Moscow bubbling angrily today, the Estonian Parliament weighed whether to follow the course of Lithuania by formally announcing a break with the Soviet Union, but it voted to put off the decision.

## Estonia May Go Next

Estonian deputies to the Congress of People's Deputies said earlier this week that Estonia would declare independence at the parliamentary session. But the legislators in Estonia apparently decided to delay such a move until after elections to the republic's own Supreme Soviet, which are scheduled for Sunday.

Members of the Estonian Parliament and deputies to the Congress in Moscow said today that they had reconsidered their strategy for achieving independence and had decided to continue talks with Moscow before their next move.

In the debate in Moscow today, there were few defenders of Lithuania because nearly all Baltic members of Congress are refusing to take part in the proceedings on the ground that they should not be involved in the policy of a nation that they are trying to leave.

In the final resolution, Mr. Gorbachev, in an attempt to ease concern over the use of force, suggested a more moderate version, authorizing the Soviet President "to insure the protection of the legal rights" of all Lithuanian residents and to "insure the observance of the rights and interests of the Soviet Union and of the union republics in Lithuania's territory." That clause was approved by the Congress.